In the claims:

Claims 1 - 3 (Cancelled)

4. (Currently Amended) A conditioning system for sterilizing products within sealed packages comprising:

a product conditioning unit including of a tunnel having two pairs of parallel sidewalls, and an entrance and an exit to form a conduit having a substantially quadrilateral cross-section, said tunnel subdivided into one or more consecutively aligned stages;

a plurality of pressure sealing doors to seal at least one stage to form a gaseous tight sealed pressurizeable stage;

a pressurizing means for controlling the pressure of said pressurizeable stage and for increasing the pressure within said pressurizeable stage to a sufficient level to prevent sealed packages from bursting upon application of heat;

a conveyor means for advancing products from up line to downline through said conditioning unit; and a heating means for providing heating in at least said pressurizeable stage of the conditioning unit, said heating means including first and second sets of microwave sources for creating a microwave field for heating products wherein said first set of microwave sources includes one or more microwave sources which emit microwaves at a right angle to the axis of advance of products advancing through said tunnel and said second set of microwave sources includes one or more microwave sources which emit microwaves at a right angle to the axis of advance of products advancing through said tunnel, said first set of microwave sources directly connected to a first sidewall and said second set of microwave sources directly connected to a second opposing sidewall ~~wherein said first and second sets of microwave sources are arranged so that products traveling up line to downline through said tunnel are positioned between said first and second sets of microwave sources~~ so that microwave energy emanates from said first microwave sources from a first side of said products and microwave energy emanates from said second microwave sources from an opposite side of said products~~; and~~

~~a conveyor means for transporting products from up line to downline through said conditioning unit~~.

5. (Previously Presented) The conditioning system for sterilizing products of claim 4 wherein said tunnel comprises a plurality of stages and each of said stages has opposing parallel top and bottom walls and opposing parallel sidewalls so that said tunnel has a substantially

rectangular cross section.

6. (Original) The conditioning system for sterilizing products of claim 5 wherein said tunnel includes at least four stages including a preheating stage, a heating stage, a holding stage and a cooling stage.

Claims 7 - 14 (Cancelled)

15. (Previously Presented) A conditioning system for sterilizing products comprising:

a product conditioning unit including of a tunnel having one or more sidewalls, an entrance and an exit, said tunnel subdivided into one or more consecutively aligned stages;

a plurality of pressure sealing doors to seal at least one stage to form a pressurizeable stage;

a pressurizing means for controlling the pressure of said pressurizeable stage;

a heating means for providing heating in at least said pressurizeable stage of the conditioning unit, said heating means including a series of microwave sources for creating a microwave field for heating products;

a conveyor means for transporting products from up line to downline through said conditioning unit;

a temperature sensor for measuring the temperature of products traveling through said tunnel; and

a controller connected to said heating means and said temperature sensor; said controller controlling said microwave sources to automatically move said microwave field within said stage depending on temperature measurements of the products within the tunnel.

16. (Previously Presented) The conditioning system for sterilizing products of claim 15 wherein said microwave sources produce a controllably moveable microwave field and said controller controlling said microwave sources to move said microwave field within said stage depending on temperature measurements of the products within the tunnel.

17. (Previously Presented) The conditioning system for sterilizing products of claim 15 wherein said conveyor means moves said products up line to downline or downline to up line through said tunnel and said conveyor means is connected to said controller, said controller controlling said conveyor means to move products up line or downline depending on temperature measurements of the products within the tunnel.

18. (Original) The conditioning system for sterilizing products of claim 16 wherein said tunnel includes at least four stages including a preheating stage, a heating stage, a holding stage and a cooling stage.

19. (Original) The conditioning system for sterilizing products of claim 16 wherein each of said stages has opposing parallel top and bottom walls and opposing parallel sidewalls so that said tunnel has a substantially rectangular cross section.

20. (Previously Presented) The conditioning system for sterilizing products of claim 15 wherein each stage includes an inlet for introducing cleaning liquid from the exterior of said tunnel into the interior of said stage and an outlet allowing cleaning liquid to drain from said stage.